RAILWAY AND CITIZEN.
SATURDAY, JUNE 28, 1890.

The General Assembly and Revision.

The dissatisfaction among Presbyterians which has led to the movement for revision to which much of the attention of the late General Assembly was given, relates mainly to the doctrine of election and decrees.

To understand what the action of the General Assembly was and what changes if any it is likely to effect in the standards, we must look at the doctrine as therein laid down. It is to be found in the confession and catechisms drawn up by the famous Assembly at Westminster, convened by order of the English Parliament in 1647. This confession and the shorter and larger Catechisms, subsequently prepared from it, were adopted by the Presbyterians of this country a century ago, and obtain the system of doctrine which the Elders and Ministers of the Church adopt at their ordination. The terms in which the doctrine of election and reprobation are set forth are fearfully clear and distinct.

By the decree of God for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others are ordained unto everlasting death. Those in each class are particularly and unchangeably designed. Their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished. Those predestinated unto life, were chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory out of God's mere grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works or any other thing in the creature as conditions or causes moving him thereunto. They who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. None others are redeemed by Christ but the elect only. The rest of mankind, God was pleased, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures to pass by and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath to the praise of his glorious justice. The wretched non elect, descended from Adam by ordinary generation, sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression. They are guilty of Adam's first sin. They are born with a depraved nature. They go on sinning through life and can do nothing else, unless regenerated by the sovereign power and grace of God, which it is certain because eternally decreed they never will experience. They are doomed and subject to all the miseries of this life and to the tormenting pains of hell forever. For them there is no way of escape, no door of deliverance, no gleam of hope, no chance of redemption, because for them no redeeming Christ has died. Yet these wretched ones are inexcusable in their guilt and deserve their dreadful end, which is to glorify the immutable justice of the sovereign God.

Whatever may be thought of this tremendous doctrine, it is not simply or put in feeble evasive terms in the Presbyterian standards. The clear, precise, sonorous and majestic language is grandly suited to the theme. The men who in that strenuous time announced it to the world believed what they said. Their meanings is plain. The diction of the confession and catechism needs no revision. The stately, forcible, majestic style befits the awful thoughts of doom.

But while the expression in our native English is that of the Westminster Divines the doctrine itself is not the product of their minds. Sublimarially as we have given it above, it was taught by St. Augustine an African Bishop of the Roman Catholic Church four hundred years after Christ. It was the prevalent Creed of that Church with varying accuracy through the succeeding ages, and was the accepted doctrine of many if not all of the early reformers. It was elaborated, and formulated by the great John Calvin of Geneva in his Roman Theological Institutes, published by that marvellous and confident systematizer at the early age of 26, and which have started a despotic power over millions of minds in every generation from that day to this: a power for the formation of great character, for excitement to great deeds and heroic religious life not to be denied: but a prodigious power also for evil, on unnumbered souls: limiting, and obscuring the Gospel of Christ: darkening with terror the winning face of a benevolent God: discouraging, distracting, crushing the purest and greatest spirits: blasting the tender buds of pious hope and promise: breaking the bruised reed: quenching the smoking flax.

In 1535, the Institutes published in Basle, were the first logical statement of the eternal past and the eternal future as considered with the loftiest stretch of human reason, and his deductions and conclusion are in an organic whole which is the "Calvinistic System." The essential if not initial and seminal principle affecting the human soul is the doctrine of election. Before it is the well known definite guiding feature of the "system." But it has been far from commanding the assent in any age of the universal Christian world. Opposed to it in Calvin's day was the teaching of Arminius holding faith a universal Gospel and a thing to be sought, asserting that Christ suffered and died for all men alike; that his atoning work, makes salvation possible for all; that every man is not guilty of Adam's sin and punishable for his fall. The system of Arminius calls the Doctors Patton and Warfield, who are also members of the revision committee.

In this condition of things it will be asked what action is left for revision? What is there for the Committee to do? We have been at some pains to find out, and so far as the limitations of our theological science have enabled us to see, we think the work of the Committee will consist mostly if not altogether, in verbal corrections, to remove the despair now thought to be permissible, whether the Confession in its statement of election and reprobation, is to be interpreted in a supralapsarian or infralapsarian sense. Does it assert that in the mind of God or in the order of His purposes, His choice of the elect and His passing by or His pretention of the non-elect, went before or came after the thought of the guilt of the fall. It is a question if it seems of the order of the divine purposes as existing from eternity not a chronological order but a logical one, a question of the relation in which one of His eternal decrees is to be taken as standing to another. That the decrees of election and reprobation preceded the decree of the fall is the supralapsarian view that they followed in the infralapsarian. It is the weight of opinion we believe among our theological teachers that the latter view is the correct one, but it is said that when the Confession was framed the Westminster Divines were divided in opinion respecting it, some holding the supra and some the infra theory: and that the language of the Confession was so framed as to be capable of either meaning and thereby be satisfactory to all. The Assembly of 1647 left open and equivocal what the Assembly of 1890 has taken measures to settle. Its settlement either way will endanger the stability or impair the integrity of the Calvinistic system inasmuch as what Calvin thought of it does not appear to be known. The Committee therefore will enter on their labors untrammeled by precedent or authority, and can bring to bear on the matter in hand, the advantages of greater knowledge of various kinds physical, metaphysical and philological, if not of greater intellectual vigor and acumen, than were possessed by the Westminster Divines. Neither will they be deterred from the prosecution of their inquiries by any agnostic misapprehension of the question: "Who by searching can find out God?"

We have more to say on the subject and will return to it hereafter.

WOMEN AND MICE.

THE PRICE WHY a woman is afraid of a mouse is a profound mystery to all of us. Why she should scream and faint at the sight of a harmless little creature, trembling with fear at the sound of its tiny voice, is one of those unfortunate state of affairs in society which no fellow can understand. Nervousness, hysterics, spasms and other distressing symptoms invariably attend those of the weaker sex who are afflicted with organic weakness and derangement of the womb. It induces profuse discharges, pain in the back, dragging sensations, internal heat, nervousness, sleeplessness, dizziness, loss of flesh, etc. Between the two there has ever been and there must ever be an irrepressible conflict. Of Augustine, whose views by varying forms have ever been influential in the Church, the great contemporary opponent was Pelagius of Calvin the famous opponent was Arminius, the Dutch Theologian, a man of the greatest ability, piety and learning, whose life was embittered by the persecutions he suffered from the Calvinistic majority, always and everywhere a rigid uncompromising class.

The controversies, that arose out of their differing opinions, were brought to an authoritative decision by the Synod of Dort in 1618. This Synod adopted the views of Calvin and condemned those of Arminius. The churches represented in the synod, were called the Reformed in distinction from the Roman Catholic, and hence also the system was called the Reformed or Calvinistic. The Westminster Assembly followed the Synod of Dort and put the same system into their Confession and Catechism, which the Presbyterian Church of this country adopted upon its organization in 1788. But it has always been more or less a subject of dispute. To large numbers of members, ministers and ministers the Calvinism of the confession and catechism, have been a living block and a rock of offence. It cannot be into them of the church into Old School and Calvinist, and New School and Arminian in the existing standards. But to the assembly certain that none should be made, the Assembly on the demand of the anti revisionists unanimously resolved as follows:

"That this Committee on revision be and hereby are instructed, that they shall not propose any alterations or amendments, that will in any way impair the integrity of the Reformed or Calvinistic system of Doctrine, taught in the Confession of Faith."

It is important to observe, the insertion in the resolution of the defining word in a theological sense the strictly technical word. *Calvinistic* as in section not desired by the liberal brethren, who wished only the general system of doctrine being the system which are required to be used by Bishops and Ministers at their ordination, and which have long been regarded, rightly or wrongly, as allowing some freedom in construing the sense in which the doctrines of the Confession are accepted. But these customary words always forbidden seemed sufficient and by many as active assent and the insertion of the additional words "Reformed or Calvinistic" was insisted on by the theologians of the Princeton School, Doctors Patton and Warfield, who are also members of the revision committee.

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NOW READ THIS STATEMENT.

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